Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended): A method for controlling the absorption of a liquid sample through an absorbent layer, comprising the steps of:

[(a)] providing an apparatus that includes:

an absorbent layer with a viewing surface;

a handle with a hole therethrough, the hole defining at least one sidewall of the handle; and

a translucent window layer attached to the handle;

wherein an air gap is defined by [a] the viewing surface of [an] the absorbent layer, the at least one side wall and a surface of [a] the translucent window layer; and

wherein the air gap is a chamber containing ambient air pressure, and

wherein the absorbent layer is permeable to gas when dry, but is relatively less permeable to gas when at least partially saturated with liquid;

applying a liquid sample to the absorbent layer on a side opposite to the air gap such that the air pressure of the air gap is increased, thereby controlling liquid sample absorption by the absorbent layer.

2. (Previously presented): The method of claim 1, wherein the sample is a human body fluid.

3. (Previously presented): The method of claim 2, wherein the fluid is a blood sample.

4. (Currently amended): An apparatus comprising:

an absorbent layer[,] with a viewing surface;

a handle with a hole therethrough, the hole defining at least one side wall of the handle;

and a translucent window layer attached to the handle,

wherein [a] the viewing surface of the absorbent layer, the at least one side wall and a surface of the translucent window layer define an air gap, and

wherein the air gap is a chamber containing ambient air pressure; and

wherein the absorbent layer is permeable to gas when dry, but is relatively less permeable to gas when at least partially saturated with liquid; and

wherein the absorbent layer, at least one sidewall, translucent window layer and air gap are adapted such that application of a liquid sample to the absorbent layer increases the air pressure of the air gap, thereby controlling liquid sample absorption by the absorbent layer.

5. (Currently amended): The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the translucent window layer is non-fogging.

6. (Previously presented): The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the absorbent layer contains a reagent that indicates the presence of an analyte.

7. (Previously presented): The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising a second layer in contact with the absorbent layer.